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THE OLD ROUND HOUSE

BY GEO. W. HAZARD.

"In the years from 1854 to 1886, an odd-shaped building stood on lots fronting 120 feet on Main street, Los Angeles, and running through to Spring. The latter street was in the earlier part of this time little more than a country road. The building was a conspicuous landmark of the town, and was universally known as the Round House, though within the memory of most American residents who were here then it was, strictly speaking, an octagon in shape. Its exact location was ninety-one and a half feet south of Third street, on the site of the present Pridham and Pinney blocks. The old well, from which water was drawn by a private arrangement, called a well sweep, consisting of a long pole, resting in the middle on an upright forked timber, and a rope at one end, to which the bucket was attached, and the other end weighted with rocks.

This land was granted by the Ayuntamiento of the pueblo of Los Angeles to Juan Bouvette and Loreta Cota, his wife, August 31st, 1847. On March 3rd, 1854, it was purchased by Remundo Alexander and Maria Valdez, his wife. Mr. Alexander was a native of France, and came to California as a sailor. In Africa he had seen houses of stone built cylindrical in form. So when he married Doña Maria, daughter of Señor Valdez, a prominent citizen and native of California, though a grandson of Spain, he varied the uniform style of building in Spanish-American countries and fashioned the new adobe dwelling for his bride after the architecture of Africa. The building was two stories high, with an umbrella-shaped shingle roof, and cost (Mrs. Alexander thinks), with the lawn, from fifteen to twenty thousand dollars. On July 28th, 1856, it was sold to George Lehman and his wife, Clara Snyder. In transferring the property, the wording of the deed follows established custom, for in Spanish countries a woman does not lose her maiden name. After marriage that of her husband is affixed to her own with the preposition de (of) between. Mr. Lehman was a native of Germany, familiarly known to his fellow-citizens as "Dutch George." He is described by those who knew him well, as a

good-natured, kind-hearted, well-meaning man, full of vagaries and fantastic notions.

After Lehman came into possession of the Round House he enlarged it by enclosing it in a frame extension about ten feet deep, which on the exterior was an octagon, and in the interior divided into additional rooms. Over the windows he painted the names of the thirteen original States, with that of California added. Mr. Lehman had a strange hallucination (exceptional in Californians) that he had found the garden of Eden, and he set to work to make his grounds as nearly as possible his conception of the dwelling place of our first parents. He built a labyrinth of arbors, which in time were hidden under a profusion of vines and roses. He planted fruit and ornamental trees, shrubbery and plants, in quantity and variety, supposed to have delighted the senses and sheltered the bodies of the progenitors of the race.

The entrance to this modern Eden was not guarded by cherubim and flaming sword, but by something probably more effective in excluding intruders; a row of "tunas" (cactus) extended across the Main and Spring streets sides that grew from ten to fifteen feet high, with branches so closely interlaced that they formed an impenetrable hedge. This garden became a thicket of foliage and bloom, to which the owner charged a small admission fee; and he sold beer and pretzels within its shady recesses. It was embellished with cement statues representing Adam and Eve reclining under a tree, with the wily serpent presumably alluring Mother Eve to take the initial step in human progress that bequeathed her name to posterity as the first woman who aspired to a higher education. Scattered about under the trees were effigies in cement of the animals which passed in review before Adam to receive their names.

For more than twenty years this garden was one of the resorts of the town, and was used on public occasions, notably the centennial celebration of July 4th, 1876. On March 6th, 1879, it passed out of possession of Lehman, sold under foreclosure of mortgage. The cactus hedge was cut down in July, 1886, when the city ordered the laying of cement sidewalks.

The building was used as a school house after Lehman left it; then as a lodging house, and in its last estate became a resort for tramps. It disappeared before the march of progress in 1887. An air of mystery in later years surrounded the unique structure and strange stories were told of the eccentric owner, not substantiated by those who knew him best."

The foregoing is from the "Land of Sunshine" for August, 1897, written by Mary M. Bowman.

It was my pleasure to see the Round House built. It was the wonder of the town; and when I first saw it, the foundation was up about 18 inches. It was built of adobe. The exact numbers of the land it occupied are 311-313-315 and 317 South Main street. The old cactus hedge was on Spring street, where the Breed block now stands; and, to be exact, covered the space now included in Nos. 308-310-312 and 314 South Spring street. Mrs. Bowman says that Georgetown *(called after George Lehman) was at the corner of Broadway and Fifth streets; it should read Sixth and Spring. There he built an addition of two stories of brick to the old house of José Rais, which is still standing—No. 605 (now the Owl Bakery); also No. 607 South Spring street, now known as "Bob's Place" lunch counter. That takes you to the alley. He cut the corner and made it octagon; and there today you can read "Georgetown Bakery." The Ralphs painted over it in black, but it has peeled off, so you can see the gold letters. Across the alley is the old house of José Lopez, now the Le Long building. The Ralphs brothers bought it in 1870, tore down the adobe and built the present block on the corner. Lehman, later, had a wine cellar on Sixth street, where the Lindley Sanitarium now stands, between the Widney block and the First Methodist church.

It is not true that Lehman gave the Sixth Street, or Central Park to the city. Donations were asked for, trees and shrubbery, etc.; and he was the first to donate. And he did with his own hands plant the first trees there; and he kept them watered with his five-gallon cans from his Sixth Street house.

The following extract from the Los Angeles Star of October 2d, 1858, gives an account of the opening of the resort, which was then well out in the country:

THE GARDEN OF PARADISE.

"The handsome grounds of the Round House in the South part of Main street have lately been fitted up as a public garden,

*My wife and I were at the christening of Georgetown, which took place at an adobe house on the East side of Spring street, south of Sixth street, one afternoon when George Lehman brought a bottle or two of wine and some baker's cookies and invited my wife and me to the christening; we were then living in a house owned by him where the store long known as Ralphs' grocery now stands. The native California girls who were there enjoyed it very much.—A. G. Mappa.

under the above rather high sounding title. In it are to be seen elegantly portrayed the primeval family, Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel; also the old serpent and the golden apples, all according to the record. There is beside a frame work containing what are called flying horses, for the amusement of children. A band of music stationed on the balcony of the house plays at intervals. The garden is tastefully laid out and is much frequented by citizens, especially on Sundays."